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Top-class and they are made locally

WHAT do names like MEC, Khind and Pensonic have in common? They can be found everywhere within our homes - in the kitchen, dining hall, bedroom and even bathroom. It may sound astonishing but these names are no longer foreign to most of us. They are now part of our life.

They have made our life simpler with their range of rice cookers, refrigerators, toasters, irons, fans, hair dryers, slow cooker, blenders, table lamps, television sets, air-conditioners, water heaters, coffee-making machines among the growing list of products.

From humble beginnings, the three have carved a niche for themselves as emerging household names in the Malaysian electrical appliances market.

MEC Bhd, which began operations in the early 1970s as Superior Products Incorporated, was the first wholly-owned Malaysian manufacturer of household electrical appliances. It also served as a reputable Original Equipment Manufacturer for many international brands.

At present, its range of home electrical appliances are being displayed at 25 Harrods outlets worldwide, thus giving the National Electrical Appliances project a great boost.

Khind, which has its origin in an electrical sales and repair shop in Sekinchan, Selangor, 37 years ago, has forecast a sales turnover of RM100 million for this year in anticipation of increased public awareness of local products and the depreciation of the ringgit which has subsequently made the company's products more competitive.

Pensonic, which started off as an electrical and electronic appliances retailer in Balik Pulau, Penang, is banking on its export sales to boost its earnings this year.

As part of its aggressive campaign abroad, the company will be taking part in the Domotechnica Fair in Cologne, Germany, next year. More than 5,000 companies worldwide are expected to participate in Europe's most prestigious trade exhibition on household and electrical appliances.

The endless breakthrough stories of Malaysian-made goods is encouraging. Their success in penetrating the competitive domestic market is the result of their painstaking efforts to initiate self-improvement, with the ultimate goal of meeting stringent quality standards.

Insisting on cutting-edge innovation, MEC has invested RM300 million in technology and machinery for its air-conditioner, refrigerator, compressor, washing machine, colour television, fan, fan motor and plastic injection moulding operations.

MEC products are certified by Sirim. In October last year, MEC Audio-Visual Sdn Bhd was awarded ISO 9002 certification. MEC Puteri Rice cooker has been noted as the first Made-in-Malaysia computerised cooker by the Malaysia Book of Records.

Its primary goal now is achieving ISO 9001 certification which comprehensively covers the total package of manufacturing including product design and research and development.

If global success is a yardstick to measure the marketability of Malaysian goods, manufacturers should be reminded of their social obligation for they are shouldering the nation's pride vis-a-vis the Made-in-Malaysia stamp on their product labels.

With already so many watchful eyes ever ready to undermine the country's credibility as a producer of quality goods, it will spell disaster for local manufacturers to submit products of mediocre quality.

Failure to uphold their claims may have a contagious effect on the marketability of not only other products of a similar category, but all Malaysian goods in general.

It would be fine if the bad apples of the industry alone bore the consequences of their own wrongdoing, but sadly, justice is never the rule of the game. The doubt cast on Malaysian-made products may threaten exports, the sector which the nation is banking on desperately to hasten the recovery of the economy, thus cushioning the ill-effects of the ringgit's depreciation and stock market's fall.

Indeed, to sustain the interest of domestic consumers and those abroad, and to keep their faith in our merchandise over the long-term is never an easy task. Unless manufacturers consistently stress quality, durability, reliability and affordability - which are prime attractions of Malaysian-made products - it will not take long before the "buy local first" enthusiasm fizzles out.

Nonetheless, feeling cheated over a product which has failed miserably to live up to its expectations, does not give consumers a good reason to favour imported items.

They should instead reject the inferior products and support those which stress quality. This way, market forces are allowed to rule and the notion of supply and demand will ultimately weed out the bad apples in the industry and services.

If Malaysian consumers accept low standards, goods of such quality will continue to flood the market. If poor service is tolerated, the providers of such poor service will proliferate and even prosper.

Consumers should be bold enough to draw the line by insisting on the best in quality of goods and services from Malaysian manufacturers and service providers.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is the nation's biggest supporter of Buy Malaysian campaigns, constantly emphasises the need for Malaysian brands to be of world-class quality.

Citing the Malaysian-made microchips found in space shuttles and vehicles, he said Malaysian products must be of the highest quality.

"We are producing some of the best electrical appliances, clothes and cars like the Proton which has won many international awards ... this is the level of our quality," he said at the opening of the "Love Malaysia Consumer and Trade Fair 1998" at the Mines exhibition centre recently.

The event is jointly organised by the Love Malaysia Action Committee and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. More than 400 manufacturers, producers and distributors are participating in the 10-day event.

Citing another example, Dr Mahathir said Japanese products were once regarded as inferior but now, they are known worldwide for their high standards.

"If the Japanese can improve the quality of their products, Malaysians can also do the same."

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